



ROCKFORD - The U.S. Economic Development Administration has awarded a \$65,000 grant toward the update and expansion of a key regional plan that has helped attract millions in federal dollars to northern Illinois in the past five years.

The EDA's short-term planning investment will update the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Winnebago and Boone counties and add McHenry County to the plan.

The CEDS will be updated by a partnership of the Rockford Region Economic Development District, Northern Illinois University and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council. Project work will begin this fall and be finished within a year.

The EDA will invest \$65,055, approximately half of the update project cost of \$133,793. The rest of the project will be funded by the local organizations.

The CEDS process is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic development roadmap to diversify and strengthen the regional economy. The CEDS prioritizes regionally important initiatives and projects, and also provides a vehicle for the region to receive certain grant funds, especially EDA funding.

The CEDS for Winnebago and Boone counties was originally approved in 2010, and many of its key initiatives have been enacted, including:

- Improvement of the entryways to Chicago Rockford International Airport via a \$2.7 million EDA grant.
- Expansion of the region's aerospace cluster through the EDA-funded Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge.
- Development of the EDA-funded Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan and a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-funded Regional Sustainability Plan, both of which will inform the CEDS update.

"The CEDS has qualified our region for significant federal support that has helped us move our economy out of recession and into growth," said Dana Hoefle, Executive Director of the Rockford Region Economic Development District. "We look forward to working with our partners in Winnebago, Boone and McHenry counties on mapping out their priorities for the next five years of key investments."

The new CEDS will include McHenry County, which has not had its own CEDS. Representatives of the three counties have worked together on several projects and identified strong economic connections, particularly with the shared advanced manufacturing base, the expanded I-90 and the recently announced Amtrak line that will link the three counties. This newly-formed tri-county partnership will use its strategic advantages to develop opportunities particularly in the aerospace, automotive, and medical device industries.



The region as a whole has a manufacturing employment concentration of 21% - more than double that of the nation – and was one of the fastest-growing parts of Illinois through much of the 2000s. It is home to major advanced-manufacturing facilities for Chrysler, UTC Aerospace Systems, Woodward, UniCarriers Americas, and Sage Products, among others.

The CEDS will be overseen by a CEDS Committee including public- and private-sector representatives from the three counties. It will be written by the staff of the Rockford Region Economic Development District, with research, analysis and public-input facilitation assistance by Northern Illinois University and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council. In addition to the previously referenced plans, the CEDS process will also use the assistance of the White House’s Strong Cities Strong Communities (SC2) initiative. Rockford, the largest city in the region, is an SC2 city.

## **ABOUT RREDD**

The Rockford Region Economic Development District (RREDD) was created in 2010 to oversee and implement Boone and Winnebago counties’ Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, a five-year strategic economic development plan. RREDD works closely with many partners as an economic development research and planning resource for job creation and growing community wealth. It is governed by a 30-member board and is supported financially by Boone and Winnebago Counties, the Rockford Area Economic Development Council and Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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